



### KEIR GALLAGHER

Keir and Heba are on a year-long tour. Follow them on Instagram @boosting\_about

**C**ycling into a desert is always a daunting prospect. We'd mapped out a chain of water points, increased our capacity to 23 litres between the two of us, and crammed our panniers with seven days' worth of breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks. Yet as we rolled out of the frontier town of Kamanjab and into Damaraland, a sparsely populated and desperately arid region of the Namib Desert, our excitement was tempered by nervousness.

Would the wells we were relying on be dry? Would our supplies last? And, perhaps just as importantly, would the scenic wonders of this inhospitable region live up to our high expectations?

### ARID BEAUTY

As it turned out, that last question was first to be answered. We'd spent the previous weeks of our tour from Kenya to Cape Town cycling and hitchhiking across the Kalahari savanna, our minds numb after 2,000 kilometres of dead-straight, pan-flat roads. I was anticipating a day or two of transition from the dull plains to the unique scenery of the Namib Desert.

But from the moment we left town, we found ourselves riding through a rapidly changing landscape. A natural sculpture park of Picasso-esque boulders rose from either side of the road, carved by millennia of wind, while jagged crags burst upwards between them like shards of glass.

Thrilled by the scenery, our first real challenge was soon visible ahead: Grootberg Pass, a snaking line of gravel weaving between the cliff-crowned, flat-topped Palmwag mountains. At just 350m in altitude, it ought to have been an uncomplicated climb, but in Namibia nothing is as straightforward as it ought to be.

As we began the approach, one of my overladen panniers became the first casualty of the rough roads: a screw had rattled loose and disappeared in the sand, leaving the bag hanging limply off the



rack. I pinched another to patch it up, and we were soon beginning the climb, hauling our 60kg bikes into a fierce headwind under the blistering sun.

It was a tiresome slog, but with stunning scenery on all sides, glowing golden in the afternoon light, it was impossible to be anything but elated as we summited the pass and rolled down to find a beautiful spot to camp. A magnificent starscape soon grew above us.